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Stephen Chan (2013) *The Morality of China in Africa: The Middle Kingdom and the Dark Continent*. London: Zed Books. 154pp, £14.99 (p/b), ISBN 978 1 78032 566 8

In this concise yet wide-ranging volume, editor Stephen Chan sets himself the ambitious (and potentially controversial) task of outlining the “moral underpinning to China’s views and actions in Africa” (p. ix). The result is a collection of essays in three parts. In the first, the editor sketches the philosophical and historical foundations of Sino-African relations. Touching amongst others upon the Confucian doctrine of *guanxi*, the Middle Kingdom and its outlands, and Three World Theory, Chan’s accessible prose succeeds in rendering these complex topics tangible for the uninitiated. In the second part, four Chinese scholars react to the opening essay, elaborating upon key themes, adding nuance, and introducing further concepts. It is stressed that “all have Western Ph.D.s” and “none is bound to a Party line” (p. ix), reflecting Chan’s candid assessment of Chinese scholarship on Africa. L.H.M Ling scrutinizes the use of the epic story of Zhuge Liang and Meng Huo as a metaphor for Sino-African relations, a recurring theme throughout the book. Xiaoming Huang rightfully points at the necessity of “differentiating the Chinese in Africa” (p. 79), with individual Chinese workers and entrepreneurs likely to care little about “whether the government in Beijing has a grand strategy in Africa”, Confucian or otherwise (p. 81). Part three then gives the floor to Africans, mainly through a detailed contribution by Patrick Mazimhaka in which he stresses the contemporary importance of historical ties and affinity between Africa and China.

Together, the chapters succeed in their aim of providing a nuanced and thorough account of ‘the morality of China in Africa’. The book fills a clear gap in the extant literature, as well as providing useful counterweight to one-dimensional portrayals of China’s African engagement. Ironically, however, the volume sometimes falls victim to the same pitfall it seeks to address. Its renderings of both ‘the West’ and ‘Africa’ are at times flat and bordering on cliché. In Jerry C.Y. Liu’s contribution in particular, the West is equated with a “realist approach” (p.48) that is “pragmatic, profit-seeking and power-hungry” (p. 57). Regarding Africa, the book’s subtitle is telling. While China may continue to regard itself as the ‘Middle Kingdom’, ‘Dark Continent’ would hardly seem Africa’s epithet of choice. Still, such stereotypical references abound. It is hence up to Patrick Mazimhaka to restore balance and attention to African agency, a role he fulfills expertly. From a book keen on nuancing common yet simplistic accounts, however, one would expect a more consistent effort across the board. Such flaws notwithstanding, this volume forms a unique, timely and well-written contribution to a lively debate.

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